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Filial Duty and Holidays: The Experiences of Midlife Single Women

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Title: Filial Duty and Holidays: The Experiences of Midlife Single Women

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Abstract:

From a feminist perspective, I have over the last decade studied several facets of holidaymaking and the tourist experience from the viewpoint of singles. In this research, I have explored how the holiday experience is shaped by geometrics of oppression, of spaces shaped by exclusion and inclusion. My rationale for studying singles is political, professional, and personal. In this paper, which is still a work in progress, I take this interest a step further by exploring midlife single men and women's holidays with aging parents. Such holidays included travel to a destination, visiting parents at their home, and hosting parental visits. I base the analysis on qualitative interviews, solicited diaries (women only), and autoethnographical reflections. The preliminary analysis suggested that the midlife single men and women considered it as their duty to spend time with and help aging and partly ailing parents. On one hand, they felt this duty as a constraint, that the parents expected them to use valuable holiday time to spend time with them. Several participants mentioned that, due to their single status, the parents expected more help from them than from siblings living with a partner. On the other hand, this duty also reflected the singles' desire to be there for their parents, that it felt right to spend time with and help in the last phase of their parents' life. Living without a partner or own children, based on my reflections, the strongest emotional ties in my life are towards my mother, and it is feels right to perform this duty.

The duty is thus also about self-interest and a sense of commitment. Moreover, the time spent with parents is also filled with enjoyable experiences—the joy of doing things together and sharing stories. Additionally, the midlife singles also pointed to how the generational gap was a source for conflicts and frustrations during the holiday, in particular, that they felt that the parents still treated them as small children. Here, they also thought that this happened because they were single. To a certain degree, holidays with aging parents were thus a space and time for 'unpaid social work'. However, this elder care was a mix of duty, strong ties, and pleasure, which for some of the midlife single men and women was a constant presence in life, holidays or not. Finally, most of the singles felt strong obligations towards their parents and believed that their lack of a partner intensified the expectations. The holiday experience for midlife single men and women was therefore about more than the freedom and independence imbuing singlehood and the tourist experience; it was also about family obligations and parental care and love.